CLAIMS/RESPONSES

CLAIM: The statistical evidence against smoking is so strong that no doubt remains about its harmful effect on health.

RESPONSE: One thing that can be said for certain about smoking is that it produces statistics. But, as has been repeatedly emphasized, statistics can be manipulated to "prove" just about anything. However, statistical associations cannot prove cause-and-effect relationships; they simply provide leads for further research.[1]

Further, the statistical studies on smoking and health have been challenged scientifically. Many of the population studies from which those statistical associations are reported have been found to be seriously flawed in their methodology and reliability of information. For example, many have relied on death certificates for information on causes of death, but death certificates have been shown in many studies to contain inaccurate information.[2]

Furthermore, many such studies have failed to take into account numerous other variables that have been associated with disease in addition to smoking, including lifestyle, occupational and environmental exposures, and

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psychological variables.[3]

Moreover, the reported "epidemic" of deaths attributed to smoking may be in part artifactual and misleading. Because diagnostic techniques have greatly improved over the last 50 years with the development of such tools as the x-ray and the bronchoscopy, many cases of diseases such as lung cancer are diagnosed today which were either missed or misdiagnosed earlier.[4] Thus, the "epidemic" may reflect dramatic medical progress. As the world's population grows in size, life expectancy has generally increased markedly. This is significant because many diseases associated with smoking are also frequently diseases of old age.

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